

Pace, I. (2016). Michael Finnissy at 70: The piano music (7). .



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MICHAEL FINNISSY AT 70
THE PIANO MUSIC (7)
IAN PACE – Piano
Recital at Holywell Music Room, Oxford

Monday November 7th, 2016, 7:30 pm

MICHAEL FINNISSY

Elephant (1994)

Tracey and Snowy in Köln (1990-91)

The larger heart, the kindlier hand (1993)

....desde que nasce... (1993)

De toutes flours (1990)

Cibavit eos (1991-92)

Zwei Deutsche mit Coda (2006)

Erscheinen ist der herrliche Tag (2003)

Choralvorspiele (Koralforspill) (2011-12)

INTERVAL

MICHAEL FINNISSY

Second Political Agenda (2000-8)

1. *ERIK SATIE like anyone else* (2000-1);
2. *Mit Arnold Schoenberg* (2002);
3. *SKRYABIN like anyone else* (2007-8)

Ian Pace would like to play the first set of four pieces in the concert as a group, then the next four pieces similarly, and in the second half, reserve applause until the end of the cycle.

In 1996, the year of Michael Finnissy's 50th birthday, I gave a series of six large concerts in London featuring his then-complete piano works. Twenty years later, Finnissy's output for piano is well over twice that size (the five-and-a-half hour *The History of Photography in Sound* (1995-2000) alone takes the equivalent of three recitals). This concert is the seventh of a series which will take place over the course of 2016-17, in a variety of locations, featuring Finnissy's principal piano works, to celebrate his 70th birthday. This music remains as important to me (and as central a part of my own repertoire) as it did twenty years ago, though many ways in which I approach and interpret it – both as performer and scholar – have moved on considerably since then.

All the works in this programme date from the 1990s onwards, and all are reasonably little-known amongst Finnissy's output. *Elephant* (which I premiered in my 1996 series) is a free and exuberant piece entirely in the upper registers of the pianos, employing pencils or other wedges to block certain bass sonorities. It was inspired by a drawing of an elephant by Adam Whalley, then a child, though is far from child's play to perform; it was written for the Belgian pianist Luk Vaes (then known simply as 'Luk').

All the other pieces draw upon found materials, though in heavily mediated forms, as is customary for Finnissy. *Tracey and Snowy in Köln* is a fleeting piece written in memoriam of the soprano Tracey Chadwell, commemorating a visit made by her and Elaine Barry (and Chadwell's mascot teddy-bear Snowy) to Cologne to perform Finnissy's *Celi* (1984, rev. 1997) for two high sopranos and ensemble. It is based upon songs that Chadwell and Finnissy worked on together.

The larger heart, the kindlier hand was written to celebrate the 60th birthday of composer Justin Connolly, an avid collector of rare music, like Finnissy. Accordingly, Finnissy drew freely upon a sample of sources from across his library, held together by series of flourishes in the bass register and recurrent descending scalar patterns.

...*desde que nasce...*, written for the 1993 I.S.C.M World Music Days in Mexico City, draws extremely freely upon a *villancico* (a form deriving originally from a rustic medieval dance lyric, consisting of a refrain (*estribillo*) at beginning and end, to frame a series of stanzas (*coplas*), but which became used in a variety of polyphonic contexts from the late 15th century onwards), 'Los que fueren de buen gusto' ('Those who had good taste'), by the Mexican composer Francisco Vidales (c. 1630-1792). But Finnissy's piece is no dance work, but a somewhat mysterious evocation of a distant music, set in the upper half of the piano.

De toutes flours, a Christmas present written for Finnissy's partner Philip Adams, exemplifies the composer's love of borrowing and cross-cultural (and trans-historical) mixings. Here he employs Guillaume de Machaut's Ballade *De toutes flours*, which the musicologist Elizabeth Eva Leach has argued was one of Machaut's most widely disseminated songs, found in eight different fourteenth- and fifteenth-century sources. It is a three-part polyphonic song, but with both a contratenor and a triplum part provided, either of which can be performed alongside the tenor and cantus. Finnissy places the triplum part in the tenor register of the piano, with the cantus in the bass, but then employs a classic prolational canonic technique to imitate the melody in the treble (albeit loosely and relatively freely). But this is not all; he then ornaments this

Guillaume de Machaut, *De toutes flours*

Cibavit eos, written in 1991 for the *Musical Times* issues commemorating 200 years since Mozart's death, is a more literal setting of an antiphon by Mozart for chorus and organ, KV 44, copied from a seventeenth-century antiphon by Johann Stadlmayr, from his *Musica super cantum gergorianum* (1625); this was often thought (by classic biographers like Hermann Abert and Otto Jahn) to be a test piece written in Bologna in 1770, but is now believed to have been composed in Salzburg, likely in 1769. Finnissy sets Mozart's copy quite literally, but intercuts this with passages of rhythmically freer monody, in the manner characteristic of various of his folk-inspired works.

The image shows a musical score for Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's 'Cibavit eos' KV 44. The score is for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass, and Organ. The lyrics are in Latin: 'Ex a - - di - pe fru - men - ti, Ex a - di - pe fru - men - ti, al - le - lu - ja, al - ti, ex a - di - pe fru - men - ti, al - le - men - ti, ex a - di - pe fru - men - ti, al - fru - men - ti, al - le -'.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Cibavit eos* KV 44.

The *Zwei Deutsche mit Coda* makes obvious reference through its title to Schubert's *Fünf Deutsche mit Coda und sieben Trios*, D 90, for string quartet. The two German Dances of the title very roughly parody the first and fifth of Schubert's pieces, employing ostinato repeated notes in a middle register in the first, and a hearty, strongly accentuated dance in the latter. Finnissy's melodies are much more fragmented than Schubert's, the harmony more slippery and chromatic (lacking a clear goal or any type of significant closure), and the bar lengths irregular; while in the latter piece, he combines a rendition of the material in the trio section with the accentuated configuration of the main part of the dance. But Finnissy's title also refers to two German composers – Schubert and Bach – and in the longer 'Coda', he draws extensively upon material from the slow movement of Bach's Concerto for Two Violins in D minor BWV 1043, again reconfigured in a wholly contemporary manner.

Nº 1.

Violino I.

Violino II.

Viola.

Violoncello.

1. 2.

Nº 5.

The musical score for No. 5 is written for three staves. The top staff is in treble clef, the middle staff is in alto clef, and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The music is in 2/4 time. The top staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The middle staff begins with an alto clef and a key signature of one sharp. The bottom staff begins with a bass clef and a key signature of one sharp. The music is composed of eighth and sixteenth notes, with various rests and dynamic markings. The first staff has a 'f' marking, the second staff has a 'p' marking, and the third staff has a 'f' marking. The music concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Trio I.

Violin I. *p*

Violin II. *p*

Cello/Double Bass. *p*

Bass. *p*

Trio II.

pp pp pp pizz.

Franz Schubert, *Fünf Deutsche mit Coda und sieben Trios*, D. 90, No. 5.

Largo ma non tanto.

poco piano

Johann Sebastian Bach, Concerto for Two Violins in D minor, BWV 1043, slow movement.

Erscheinen ist der herrliche Tag is an even more elaborate and somewhat Ivesian construction which superimposes the hymn 'O Brother, be faithful' by the Massachusetts composer Isaac Woodbury (1819-58) with the chorale 'Erscheinen ist der herrlich Tag', written by Nicolaus Herman in 1560, as set by Bach in his Cantatas BWV 67 and 145. This is intercut with two bars of freer chromatic writing ranging into higher registers.

Erschienen ist der herrlich Tag
from a 17th-century hymnal

Er-schie-nen ist der herr-lich Tag, dran sich nie-mand gnug freu-en mag: Christ, un-ser Herr, heut tri-um-phiert,
all sein Feind er ge-fan-gen führt. Hal-le-lu-jah.



Isaac Woodbury, 'O Brother, be faithful' (1847).

Finnissy's *Choralvorspiele* (*Koralforspill*) (the title in brackets is Norwegian) is a set of eight pieces in the tradition of the chorale prelude, a setting of a single verse of a chorale, generally for organ, played to the congregation before they would sing the chorale; or more widely any setting of a chorale for organ. Amongst the composers who practised this genre were the seventeenth-century organist and composer Franz Tunder, J.S. Bach, and Dietrich Buxtehude, though it continued in the twentieth century (not least at the hands of the interwar German composers associated with the 'Back to Bach' movement). Ferruccio Busoni, a perennial inspiration for Finnissy, wrote original works in this medium, and also a set of ten piano transcriptions of Bach organ chorale preludes.

The set is in two halves, each based in chorales deriving from Lutheran traditions; the first four pieces are all settings of Norwegian spiritual folk music, in particular from the collection by O.M. Sandvik, *Norske Religiøse Folketoner*. Norwegian folk music of various types has been a recurrent concern for Finnissy (not least in his piano works *Folklore* and *Eadweard Muybridge – Edvard Munch*), and he has frequently

visited the country and had works performed by various Norwegian musicians; the *Choralvorspiele* were first performed complete by Mark Knoop in the Borealis Festival in Bergen in 2012. Three of these pieces were earlier written for organ, for Finnissy's partner Philip Adams to play at St. Michael and All Angels church in Brighton, and are transcribed quite literally for piano (*En Krybbe Er Hans Første Eie*, *Bryd Frem Mit Hjertes Trang*, and *Midt Igjennem Nød Fare Veien Går Til Paradis* – Nos. 1, 2, and 4 respectively). All four are relatively pensive in nature.

The second group all come a tradition of sacred choral music from the American South, associated with 'revival' services, as collected in the volume *The Sacred Harp*, first published in 1844. The four hymns, predominantly concerned with death are, respectively, 'Elysian' ('Burst, ye emerald gates, and bring, To my raptured vision'); 'Sing to me of Heaven' ('O, sing to me of heaven, When I am call'd to die'); 'Repentance' ('Oh, if my soul was formed for woe, How would I vent my sighs!'); and 'Morning' ('He dies, the friend of sinners dies, Lo! Salem's daughters weep around'). The sixth piece was originally an organ work, *Son sing to me of Heaven*, written for Carson Cooman.

ELYSIAN. 7, 6, 7, 6, 7, 7, 7, 7. Baptist Harmony, p. 471. 139

1 Burst, ye emerald gates, and bring To my raptured vision; All thy restation: joy that spring Round the bright e-ly-sian.

2 Floods of everlasting light Freely flash before him; Myriads, with supreme delight, Instantly adore him: Angel trumpets resound his fame, Lutes of lucid gold proclaim All the music of his name, Heav'n echoing with the theme.

3 Four-and-twenty elders rise From their princely station; Shout his glorious victories, Sing the great salvation;

4 Hark! the thrilling symphonies Seem, methinks, to seize us! Join we too their holy lays, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus! Sweetest sound in seraphs' song Sweetest notes on mortal tongue Sweetest carol ever sung: Jesus, Jesus, roll along.

Cast their crowns before his throne, Cry, in reverential tone, Glory give to God alone; "Holy, holy, holy One!"

Finnissy employs a wider range of styles in this group: No. 5 clearly parodies the style of Busoni's Chorale Prelude after Bach's 'Nun freut euch, lieben Christen', while No. 7 imitate the 'Recordare' from Mozart's *Requiem*, of which Finnissy had been working on his own (very free) completion prior to composing this piece.

Allegro.
 Lebhaft und heiter. Die Figuration sehr fließend bei grosser Getrenntheit.
 Molto scorrevole, ma distintamente.

4. *mf leggiermente* *marc. il canto fermo*
il Basso sempre staccato

Bach-Busoni, 'Nun freut euch, lieben Christen'

While the *First* and *Third Political Agendas* have very explicitly 'political' titles (alluding to Thatcher, Corruption, UKIP, etc), this is not true of the *Second Political Agenda*, a collection of three pieces, each around 20 minutes long, written during the 2000s, each a type of portrait of the composer in question. It is not entirely clear in what sense the term 'political' is to be understood here (my personal view is that *all* art is in some sense 'political', though on the other hand that can trivialise the term), but it can fairly be said that each piece considers the meanings of the figures concerned for Finnissy on a personal level, and ways in which his own musical work is informed by their own (so 'the personal is the political'?). Furthermore, the set can be seen as a set of contemporary reflections on how the three composers in question responded to the imperatives – themselves socially founded – of their own time.

Detailed accounts of sources for each of these works would probably appear like overkill here, so I will simply summarise the main sections of each to facilitate listening. *ERIK SATIE like anyone else* is in four sections, representing different stages of Satie's life. The first is a short allusion to plainchant, in which Satie had a deep interest, and set in his *Quatre Ogives* (1886), though Finnissy sets this in parallel fifths (displaced by two octaves) rather than Satie's unison. The second section consists of a series of modified quotations from Emmanuel Chabrier's Wagner-obsessed opera *Gwendoline* (1879-85) as a possible source for the relatively non-functional musical language found in Satie's *Trois Sarabandes* (1887). Then follows a series of modified quotations from Beethoven, as a representation of Satie's 're-training' as a mature student at the Schola Cantorum from 1905 to 1908, where he worked with Albert Roussel (Satie kept a series of sketchbooks from this time, which have been compared to those of Beethoven). Finally, Finnissy alludes clearly ragtime and Satie's popular idioms, referencing Satie's work in the 1880s and 1890s playing

in the *café-concert* (in particular in the *Chat noir* in Montmartre) and ultimately his ballet *Parade* (1916-17), before dissolving this back into Beethovenian material for a serene coda. The work is a portrait of a composer continually drawn to the simple, the seemingly innocent, the popular, but haunted by demands for weightiness and seriousness.

Mit Arnold Schoenberg opens with an intense section drawing upon material from Schoenberg's Lieder op. 1 and 2, *Gurrelieder* and other early works, intercut with allusions to Brahms's String Quartet in C minor op. 51 no. 1, specifically the section (bars 11-23 of the first movement) which Schoenberg himself cited in his essay 'Brahms the Progressive' (1933) as an example of harmonic innovation. The music pushes at the boundaries of tonality, but is drawn back towards it (as symbolised by Brahms). Finnissy segues from this into a hushed and mysterious passage spanning the whole keyboard, which Finnissy relates to 'the expressionist landscape of *Erwartung* and *Herzgewächse*'. Then, after a short passage of louder angular writing intercut with lost, 'cold expressionless' *ppppp!* Fragments, the next section is headed by a quotation from Walter Benjamin's late Theses on the Philosophy of History, 'das Kontinuum der Geschichte AUFZUSPRENGEN' ('blast open the continuum of history'), and consists of characteristic (for Finnissy) explosive writing derived from the foregoing material.

But, just as Schoenberg felt the hyper-intensity of his free atonal works to be a *cul-de-sac*, so Finnissy dissolves this material and presents a stark series of isolated pitches with varying durations and dynamics, like a sudden leap forward to post-1945 integral serial language. But, most unexpectedly, Finnissy suddenly neutralises the dynamics to a uniform *piano* and mostly triadic harmonies, in a reference to Schoenberg's 1940 comment to his composition class in Los Angeles that 'There is still plenty of good music to be written in C major'. Despite the introduction of some more dissonant harmonies again, and a brief allusion back to the more angular material, Finnissy concludes the piece by launching into a somewhat mangled rendition of the first movement of Beethoven's String Quartet in G, op. 18, no. 2, a type of highly ironic conclusion.

L. van Beethoven, Op. 18 N° 2
(1770 - 1827)

Allegro ♩ = 96

Violino I

Violino II

Viola

Violoncello

5

10

15

20

A

Ludwig van Beethoven, String Quartet in G, op. 18, no. 2, first movement.

SKRYABIN in itself features what is essentially a bi-partite structure. The first section of the piece alludes freely across a range of Skryabin's early Chopin-esque piano works, most prominently and recognisably the Prelude in G# minor, op. 22, no. 1, moving from this still essentially tonal music towards three different canons (in the loosest sense of the term), perhaps a reference to Skryabin's own early Canon in D minor (1883), though much more chromatic and tonally diffuse. But this music is intercut with another type of material, looking forward to the other-worldly and more static music of late Skryabin, signalled by a mixture of chromatic material in the right hand with the incessant knell of repeated notes in the bass.

The second section enacts an operation upon the material which recurs throughout Finnissy's *The History of Photography in Sound*: a hyper-fragmentation and dissolution into unmeasured snippets of music, small islands of sound (though still ultra-refined) within a sea of silence, continuing for a disconcertingly long period, before some type of continuity is regained. Then Finnissy introduces some violent

interjections towards the end, spanning the whole keyboard, in the manner of Skryabin's note complexes, saturating harmonic space.



Aleksander Skryabin, Prelude in G# minor, op. 22, no. 1

All three composers were striving for some new musical language, but felt pulled in opposing directions: Satie towards popular music; Schoenberg towards classic tonality; Skryabin towards silence. Finnissy dramatizes these conflicts in ways which mirror many of those present in his own work and musical personality.

With many thanks to Nigel McBride for his help in making this and the following concert possible.

The next concert in Ian Pace's series of the piano music of Michael Finnissy will take place on Monday November 21st, 2016 at the Holywell Music Room, Oxford, at 19:30. It will include a complete performance of Finnissy's extended *Beat Generation Ballads*, as well as his Samuel Beckett-inspired *Enough*, and the UK premiere of his *Brahms-Lieder*, together with a range of shorter pieces, many tributes and transcriptions of composers from Erik Satie, Oliver Messiaen, Georgi Tutev, to a setting of the Beatles' song *Two of Us*.

IAN PACE is a pianist of long-established reputation, specialising in the farthest reaches of musical modernism and transcendental virtuosity, as well as a writer and musicologist focusing on issues of performance, music and society and the avant-garde. He was born in Hartlepool, England in 1968, and studied at Chetham's School of Music, The Queen's College, Oxford and, as a Fulbright Scholar, at the Juilliard School in New York. His main teacher, and a major influence upon his work, was the Hungarian pianist György Sándor, a student of Bartók.

Based in London since 1993, he has pursued an active international career, performing in 24 countries and at most major European venues and festivals. His absolutely vast repertoire of all periods focuses particularly upon music of the 20th and 21st Century. He has given world premieres of over 200 piano works, including works by Patrícia de Almeida, Julian Anderson, Richard Barrett, Konrad Boehmer, Luc Brewaeys, Aaron Cassidy, James Clarke, James Dillon, Pascal Dusapin, Richard Emsley, James Erber, Brian Ferneyhough, Michael Finnissy (whose complete piano works he performed in a landmark 6-concert series in 1996), Christopher Fox, Wieland Hoban, Volker Heyn, Evan Johnson, Maxim Kolomiets, André Laporte, Hilda Paredes, Alwynne Pritchard, Horatiu Radulescu, Lauren Redhead, Frederic Rzewski, Thoma Simaku, Howard Skempton, Gerhard Stäbler, Andrew Toovey, Serge Verstockett, Hermann Vogt, Alistair Zaldua and Walter Zimmermann. He has presented cycles of works including Stockhausen's *Klavierstücke I-X*, and the piano works of Ferneyhough, Fox, Kagel, Ligeti, Lachenmann, Messiaen, Radulescu, Rihm, Rzewski and Skempton. He has played with orchestras including the Orchestre de Paris under Christoph Eschenbach (with whom he premiered and recorded Dusapin's piano concerto *À Quia*), the SWF Orchestra in Stuttgart under Rupert Huber, and the Dortmund Philharmonic under Bernhard Kontarsky (with whom he gave a series of very well-received performances of Ravel's Concerto for the Left Hand). He has recorded 34 CDs; his recent recording of Michael Finnissy's five-and-a-half hour *The History of Photography in Sound* (of which he gave the world premiere in London in 2001) was released by Divine Art in October 2013 to rave reviews. Forthcoming recordings will include the piano works of Brian Ferneyhough (to be released in 2017), the Piano Sonatas of Pierre Boulez, John Cage's *The Music of Changes*, and the piano works of Marc Yeats. The 2016-17 season includes appearances in London, Leuven, Basel, Prague, Lisbon, and around the UK.

He is Lecturer in Music and Head of Performance at City University, London, having previously held positions at the University of Southampton and Dartington College of Arts. His areas of academic expertise include 19th century performance practice (especially the work of Liszt and Brahms), issues of music and society (with particular reference to the work of Theodor Adorno, the Frankfurt School, and their followers), contemporary performance practice and issues, music and culture under fascism, and the post-1945 avant-garde, in particular in West Germany, upon which he is currently completing a large-scale research project. He co-edited and was a major contributor to the volume *Uncommon Ground: The Music of Michael Finnissy*, which was published by Ashgate in 1998, and authored the monograph *Michael Finnissy's The History of Photography in Sound: A Study of Sources, Techniques and Interpretation*, published by Divine Art in 2013. He has also published many articles in *Music and Letters*, *Contemporary Music Review*, *TEMPO*, *The Musical Times*, *The Liszt Society Journal*, *International Piano*, *Musiktexte*, *Musik & Ästhetik*, *The Open Space Magazine*, as well as contributing chapters to *The Cambridge History of*

Musical Performance, edited Colin Lawson and Robin Stowell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), *Collected Writings of the Orpheus Institute: Unfolding Time: Studies in Temporality in Twentieth-Century Music*, edited Darla Crispin (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2009), *The Modernist Legacy*, edited Björn Heile (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), and *Beckett's Proust/Deleuze's Proust*, edited Mary Bryden and Margaret Topping (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). Forthcoming articles will appear in *Search: Journal for New Music*, and *Music and Letters*.